



NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Interim Guidance for Owners, Staff and Patrons of Essential Businesses

April 3, 2020

Governor Cooper's Executive Order 121 on March 27 issues a statewide Stay at Home Order beginning Monday, March 30, 2020 at 5 p.m. until April 29, 2020. This order directs people to stay at home except to visit essential businesses, to exercise outdoors or to help a family member. Specifically, the order bans gatherings of more than 10 people and directs everyone to physically stay at least six feet apart from others. [FAQ](#).

Businesses that are required to cease all activities are still allowed to continue minimum basic operations. These operations include activities necessary to maintain the value of the business's inventory, preserve the condition of the business's physical plant and equipment, ensure security, process payroll and employee benefits or related functions, and support employees who are working remotely. However, employees must comply with social distancing requirements, to the extent possible, while carrying out such operations.

About Essential Businesses

All businesses and operations are directed to have employees work from home or telework to the maximum extent possible. At this time, essential businesses and organizations do not need any documentation from the State to continue operations. Employees are not required to have specific documentation to report to work under this Order.

Essential businesses* include:

- Restaurants that provide take-out, drive-thru, or delivery
- Grocery stores
- ABC stores and beer and wine stores
- Doctors and other healthcare providers
- Pharmacies
- Hardware stores
- Post offices
- Office supply stores
- Gas stations and convenience stores
- Veterinarians and pet supply stores
- Hotels, airports, airlines, buses, taxis, and rideshare services
- Places of worship

- Car dealerships
- Childcare providers (that are following the required NCDHHS procedures) **

* Businesses that were previously required to close under an Executive Order or a local Stay at Home order are currently not permitted to re-open.

** Although childcare providers are urged to remain open for first responders and essential employees, they are also open to the general public. All open childcare providers must follow the NCDHHS emergency childcare operations and financing guidance.

For a full list of essential businesses, please see [Executive Order 121](#).

If your business is not included in the list of essential businesses and operations and you believe it is essential, you can [submit an application](#) online to the [North Carolina Department of Revenue](#) (NCDOR). NCDOR will review applications to determine whether the business is necessary to properly respond to this COVID-19 pandemic.

Guidelines for Conducting Essential Business

Any scenario in which many people gather together poses a risk for COVID-19 transmission. All essential businesses and agencies that congregate people in an enclosed space should create and implement a plan to minimize the opportunity for COVID-19 transmission at their facility. This guidance will help public-facing businesses and agencies reduce the spread of COVID-19 in their communities.

1) Plan Ahead

Communicate with the planning staff and/or emergency operations coordinator at your facility. Discuss emergency plans and procedures and determine how they will be implemented.

- Review any emergency plans you already have and update them if necessary.
- Make a plan for what you will do if large numbers of employees are unable to attend work, which may occur because schools are closed or their family members may become sick. Identify key positions and cross-train staff to ensure all essential functions will be covered.
- If you have employees who are at a higher risk for complications from COVID-19, including people over 65 and those with pre-existing medical conditions or a compromised immune system, find positions that minimize contact with the public.
- Consider alternative options to gathering large groups of people, such as streaming video or having patrons participate online.
- Stay informed about COVID-19 in your community.

2) Establish Open and Clear Communication

Identify effective means of communication and provide clear messages with employees and patrons about prevention measures and social distancing practices.

- Instruct all employees and patrons to stay home if they are sick. Post signs encouraging participants/patrons to not enter or leave immediately if they begin to show symptoms of illness.

- Encourage patrons who are at a higher risk for complications from COVID-19, including people over 65 and those with pre-existing medical conditions, to stay home as much as possible.
- Post signs with clear instructions of steps employees and patrons should take to maintain social distancing.
- Create flexible sick leave policies for employees to be able to stay home from work when they are sick. Employees may discontinue isolation and return to normal activities when it has been at least 7 days since their first day of illness AND they have been without fever for three days (72 hours) and their other symptoms are improving, in consultation with their health care providers and state and local health departments.
- Employers should not ask for a negative COVID-19 test or a note from a medical provider for employees to return to work.

3) Take Commonsense Prevention Measures

Promote behaviors that prevent the spread of respiratory diseases, including COVID-19, among patrons and employees. Use resources from a trusted source like the [CDC](#) or [NCDHHS](#).

- Encourage patrons and employees to wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds at a time, avoid touching their face with unwashed hands, and avoid close contact with people who are ill.
- Share other measures to prevent the spread of respiratory illness like covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Have sanitizing essentials available for employees and patrons, including soap, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol, tissues, and lined trash cans.
- Disinfect frequently-touched surfaces with a [cleaning agent that is effective against coronaviruses](#) throughout the day and at close of business.

4) Practice Social Distancing

Businesses must meet social distancing requirements by maintaining at least six feet (or two arm lengths) between employees, between patrons, and between employees and patrons to minimize the risk of spreading coronavirus infection. Individuals should remain six feet apart at all times except at the point of sale or purchase. Recognizing that this may be challenging, below are examples how you can encourage social distancing.

- Place chairs and tables at least six feet apart, organize your workflow to restrict crowding or grouping, and limit the number of patrons and employees in a space at any given time.
- If you typically have people waiting in line, consider marking six-foot intervals on the floor for patrons to stand on.
- Only let as many people in as your establishment can accommodate while everyone remains six feet apart. If people must wait to be let in, have them wait in their cars and contact them by phone when they can enter.

- Have employees remain six feet apart from each other and patrons whenever possible.

5) Cancel or Postpone Events

[CDC recommends](#) that all gatherings of 10 or more people be postponed or cancelled, particularly for individuals at higher risk for severe illness. Typical gatherings of people, such as weddings and religious gatherings, are subject to the mass gathering ban and may not have more than 10 people. [Funerals are time-sensitive events and may not have more than 50 people](#). Participants at all gatherings should practice social distancing.

- Postpone or cancel any non-essential events. Create a list of all actions that need to be taken under these circumstances.
- For essential events, consider cancelling if there are many cases of COVID-19 in your community, if there will be many high-risk attendees, or if there have been several recent cases of COVID-19 among potential attendees. [Contact your local health department](#) if you need further guidance.
- Identify all people that you will need to communicate with if you need to postpone or cancel an event, including employees, vendors, and participants. Ensure you have up-to-date contact information for these groups and create a plan for communicating with them in an emergency.
- If you determine that an event needs to be cancelled or postponed, immediately communicate this information to all stakeholders including participants, employees, and vendors. Include information about refunds and rescheduling, if applicable.

6) Support Local Health Department Efforts as Needed

If a patron or employee is diagnosed with COVID-19, your local health department may ask you for contact information for anyone else who may have been exposed. If this occurs, people who had close contact with the COVID-19 patient will be asked to monitor themselves for symptoms for 14 days.

- If you hear about an employee or patron who was diagnosed with COVID-19, [contact your local health department](#). Do not take any action to notify potential close contacts without consulting your local health department.
- If an employee or patron is diagnosed with COVID-19, ensure that all areas of the venue or facility they visited have been thoroughly cleaned with an [agent that is active against coronaviruses](#). You do not need to close the venue or facility.

For general information about COVID-19, refer to the [North Carolina COVID-19 website](#). More guidance for businesses related to COVID-19 is also available [online](#).